

**RAWLINS FIELD OFFICE  
NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT  
ANNUAL REPORT**  
February 2001

## I. INTRODUCTION

Two types of environmental documents are summarized in the pages to follow: environmental impact statements (EISs) and environmental assessments (EAs). These two categories of documents make up the majority of BLM documents required for fulfilling the substantive environmental goals set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The documents listed may or may not be completed to-date. Environmental impact statements generally require 18 to 24 months to complete and are lengthy documents requiring formal public review. An EIS is intended to provide decisionmakers and the public with a complete and objective evaluation of significant environmental impacts, both beneficial and adverse, resulting from the proposed action and other reasonable alternatives. Environmental assessments can, on occasion, be quite lengthy and as complex as EISs but are normally much shorter analyses completed within the year in which they are initiated. Some EAs initiated late in the year will be carried over into the following year.

## II. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS

The Rawlins Field Office had the lead for, or participated in, the following EIS-level projects during the past year. An EIS is required when the proposed project under analysis is known (from past experience with similar projects) to cause significant environmental impacts or it is anticipated that the project will result in significant environmental impacts.

- A. Continental Divide/Wamsutter II Natural Gas Project** - The CD/WII project is a proposal of Amoco Production Company, Union Pacific Resources Company (Anadarko), Yates Petroleum Corporation, Snyder Oil Corporation (Devon), and other companies. The Record of Decision for this project was issued on May 24, 2000. The decision allowed up to 2,130 natural gas wells at 2,130 locations within the project area including access roads, pipelines, and other ancillary facilities. An additional 870 wells/well locations (no more than 435 wells or well locations on federal lands and/or federal mineral estate) may be considered pending completion of a planning review of the Great Divide Resource Management Plan for the Rawlins Field Office.

The 1,061,200-acre project area is located approximately 25 miles west of Rawlins and 40 miles east of Rock Springs and is bisected by Interstate Highway 80.

Over 1,000 wells exist within the project area. Of these, more than 150 wells have been drilled since the project was proposed several years ago. Drilling predictions show approximately 250 to 300 new wells will be drilled each year for the next three to four years.

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- B. South Baggs Area Natural Gas Development Project** - The Record of Decision for this project was issued in August 2000. The ROD defines the decision, explains the rationale (including key management considerations), and includes standards, mitigation, and monitoring requirements for the South Baggs Area Natural Gas Development Project. The decision approved the proposed action and allows up to 50 additional wells within the project area.

The South Baggs Area Natural Gas Development Project EIS analyzed the impacts of

drilling and production operations for a project in southcentral Wyoming. The project is located in Carbon County, Wyoming, within Townships 12 and 13 North, Ranges 92 and 93 West, 6<sup>th</sup> Principal Meridian. Merit Energy Company's South Baggs Area Natural Gas Development Project comprises approximately 12,352 acres of mixed federal, state, and private lands. The proposed action would increase natural gas production in the South Baggs project area by allowing the operators to drill and develop approximately 50 natural gas wells in addition to existing operations within the project area. Total life expectancy of the South Baggs Natural Gas Production Area is estimated to be approximately 35 years.

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- C. Desolation Flats Natural Gas Development Project** - On March 16, 2000, Marathon Oil Company, on behalf of itself and other operators, filed a letter with the Bureau of Land Management indicating its intent to explore for and develop natural gas resources in south-central Wyoming. The project area falls approximately within Townships 14-16 North and Ranges 94-96 West. Marathon; EOG Resources, Inc.; Tom Brown, Inc.; Basin Exploration, Inc.; Questar Exploration and Production Company; Merit Energy Company; and Santa Fe Snyder Corporation, have indicated that approximately 385 wells on 361 well locations may be drilled in the approximately 232,000-acre Desolation Flats Project Area (DFPA). The Mulligan Draw EIS Area is included as part of the DFPA due to concerns that exploration/development within the Mulligan Draw EIS area is occurring in multiple formations and may advance beyond the one well per section spacing analyzed in the Mulligan Draw EIS. The Dripping Rock EA is included as part of the DFPA due to the outdated nature of the environmental analysis. The companies project that development activity would continue for approximately 20 years with a 30-50 year life-of-project. Various associated facilities (e.g., roads, pipelines, power lines, water wells, disposal wells, evaporation ponds, compressor stations, gas processing facility) would also be constructed throughout the DFPA. Exploration and delineation activities would be allowed to continue under an interim development plan. A public scoping notice to identify issues and concerns to be addressed in the EIS was made available to the public on May 18, 2000.

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## **II. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS**

The Rawlins Field Office initiated 288 environmental assessments during 2000. The Rawlins Field Office NEPA EA Register can be accessed by going to <http://www.wy.blm.gov/nepa/nffo.html> and selecting the appropriate year and field office. An EA must be prepared for proposed actions that are not exempt from NEPA, have not been categorically excluded, have not been covered by an existing environmental analysis, and do not normally or obviously require an EIS. An EA may be prepared for any action at any time to assist in planning and decision-making. It provides sufficient evidence and analysis of impacts on the quality of the human environment to support a determination of no significant impacts or a determination to prepare an EIS.

Environmental assessments are not normally sent out to the general public for review but are made available for review in the Rawlins Field Office upon request. However, certain actions are of major interest or of sufficient scope to warrant specific mention in this report. The following EAs either have had formal public review because of the level of public interest or are projects that transect southern Wyoming but are not expected to have significant impacts. Any project can

receive informal public review by contacting this office. Formal public review can also be requested.

- A. Atlantic Rim Coalbed Methane Exploration Project** - In May 2000, Stone & Wolf sold their operating rights in the Atlantic Rim Coalbed Methane Project area to Warren-PEDCO, Inc. (PEDCO). At the time the project changed hands, the proposal remained essentially the same--to explore and potentially develop three coalbed methane areas (pods). The three pods would be located in an area beginning approximately six miles northeast of Baggs to 24 miles north of Baggs and east of Wyoming Highway 789. The total project area encompasses approximately 8,000 acres, of which 7,920 acres are federal surface and 80 acres are private surface.

The exploratory pod program would consist of drilling, completing, and producing approximately 32 wells in each pod for evaluation, with a spacing density of eight wells per section. The project would help the company determine: 1) which coals are gas productive, 2) economical drilling and completion techniques, 3) if dewatering of the coal can be achieved, and 4) what depths or pressure windows may be preferred to target economic gas production.

The Scoping Notice was mailed out to the public on February 25, 2000, and public meetings were held in Baggs, Wyoming, on March 15 and Rawlins, Wyoming, on March 16, 2000. The comment period for public scoping ended on April 1, 2000.

The environmental document will be prepared as an environmental assessment but may be advanced to the environmental impact statement level if significant issues result from public scoping or if the EA concludes that significant impacts are likely to occur. If the exploratory project is deemed successful, any development plans beyond the scope of the EA would require additional environmental analysis. It is anticipated that the Decision Record will be issued during the second quarter of 2001.

**Contact: Brenda Vosika Neuman, Team Lead (307) 328-4389**

- B. Seminoe Coalbed Methane Exploration Project** - In April 2000 Dudley & Associates, LLC (Dudley), contacted the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Rawlins Field Office with a proposal to explore and potentially develop a coalbed methane pilot project located on checkerboard lands in Townships 23 and 24 North, Range 85 West, Carbon County, in an area southwest of Seminoe Reservoir.

The proposed project consists of drilling, completing, and producing 19 wells for evaluation. The proposed method of water disposal is to pipe the water to designated discharge points located in small drainages of the North Platte River. The federal action for this project involves drilling eight wells with associated access roads and pipelines. Development on adjacent private lands with existing access will occur during the preparation of the environmental assessment. Also, federal approval will be necessary for the proposed natural gas pipeline linking the project area with existing interstate natural gas pipelines along Interstate 80 near Sinclair, Wyoming. The proposed route would generally follow an existing pipeline from the project area to Sinclair.

The BLM began scoping this project in early June 2000, and 18 responses were received. Although several issues were identified, the issue most often raised was how water produced during coalbed methane development might affect downstream fisheries

in the North Platte River. In addition concerns were raised regarding the project's affect on wildlife, recreational opportunities, and ranching operations.

A Water Management Plan and Biological Assessment have been prepared for the project.

Because the project is located in a concentration area for the mountain plover, the BLM has initiated formal conferencing with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). It is anticipated that the USFWS will render its Biological Opinion on or before May 1, 2001.

Dudley has requested that BLM allow it to drill two test wells on federal land. In addition, four production wells will be drilled on private lands to the north as well as one pressure observation well. The interim (exploration) drilling is allowed in order to obtain data for the project EA.

The project EA is anticipated to be completed in late spring-to-summer 2001.

**Contact: Brenda Vosika Neuman, Team Lead (307) 328-4389**

- C. Snowy Range Vegetation Treatment EA** - The Rawlins Field Office, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and the Medicine Bow National Forest are proposing to recreate historic burn frequencies in shrub areas of the Snowy Range, mainly in the Platte Valley and Sheep Mountain mule deer herd areas. The purpose of the treatment is to improve the quality of ungulate big game seasonal ranges. The goal is to create 25 different age classes of shrubs over a 25-year period. Prescribed burning would be the method of choice in most treatment areas, but herbicide or mechanical treatments could be implemented in selected areas where burning is not feasible.

The environmental assessment will be a programmatic document and will analyze the more general aspects of the proposal. More detailed, site-specific analysis will be prepared for each individual treatment.

**Contact: Mary Apple, Team Lead (307) 328-4329**

- D. Pioneer Pipeline Project** - The Decision Record approving this project was signed in June 2000. Pioneer Pipe Line Company proposed construction of a new 12-inch diameter buried petroleum products pipeline from the Sinclair Refinery in Sinclair, Wyoming, to an existing block valve near Croydon, Utah. An existing pipeline along the same general Interstate 80 route has proven to be of insufficient capacity to meet the needs of petroleum product demand in Utah. The pipeline will provide product to Rock Springs and Little America, Wyoming, and Salt Lake City, Utah. The proposed pipeline is approximately 262 miles long (230 miles in Wyoming and 32 miles in Utah) and traverses portions of Carbon, Sweetwater, and Uinta Counties in Wyoming and Summit, Rich, and Morgan Counties in Utah. The pipeline crosses approximately 86 miles of BLM-administered land in Wyoming.

**Contact: Janelle Wrigley, Team Lead (307) 328-4279**

- E. Hanna Coalbed Methane Exploration Project** - In January 2001, Barrett Resources Corporation informed the BLM that it wishes to go forward with its plans to drill a total of 18 wells in the Hanna Basin during 2001. Twelve of the wells will be located on

private fee surface and only involve private minerals. The other six wells would be located on federal lands in Township 23 North, Range 81 West, approximately four miles northeast of Hanna, Wyoming. In general, the Barrett proposal overlaps the area reviewed for coalbed methane development in the Metfuel Hanna Basin Coalbed Methane Project Environmental Impact Statement prepared in 1993.

It has been determined that an exploratory EA will be prepared using a third party contractor. No schedule for the preparation and completion of this EA has yet been developed.

**Contact: Brenda Vosika Neuman, Team Lead (307) 328-4389**

Following issuance of our first NEPA report in March 1996, we received comments from various entities asking for additional information on environmental assessments for project proposals. In past years we included a map and table that provided additional information on our non-energy related environmental documents and projects. Last year we placed our NEPA log on the website, along with this report. This information has allowed the public to comment on proposals or request additional information on specific projects in locations or general areas of interest to them within the Rawlins Field Office management area. Also, listing our NEPA log on the website allows us to list projects as early as possible in the planning cycle to assure that public comment is received in a timely manner.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

We can reasonably anticipate that roughly the same number and type of projects and environmental documents will be proposed during 2001. Because of the large number of activities and the regular acceptance of new proposals, it is impossible to predict the type and level of all environmental documents that will be prepared during the year.

Our procedure for soliciting public involvement for new projects is to assess the type of activity and level of analysis required. Scoping statements are prepared and mailed for all EISs, potential RMP amendments, and non-routine actions such as land exchanges. In addition, notices of actions of this magnitude are also published in newspapers and, if required, in the *Federal Register*. You can add your name to our mailing list for these types of actions by contacting our office. Scoping documents are not normally sent out for routine projects such as most range and wildlife projects or site-specific mineral development. We appreciate your comments on our annual report and hope to make future reports as useful to you as possible.

If any of the information provided is of interest to you, or if you would like additional information on any of the documents described above, please contact the Rawlins Field Office at the following address:

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